

State of the Municipality Address

Mayor Nicholas J. Gresock

Municipality of Monroeville, Pennsylvania

January 9, 2018

Section 606 (g) of Monroeville's Home Rule Charter requires for the Mayor to prepare and deliver a "State of the Municipality" report to the citizens of Monroeville.

In 2017, the mayor, council, manager, and staff maintained and delivered a wide range of services and amenities: General government services, the tax office, community development and planning, building and engineering, public safety, public works, garbage and recycling collection, animal control, an animal shelter, 15 public parks, a dog park, skate park, community pool, recreational programming, an outdoor amphitheater, senior citizen center, library and a public television station delivering local programming and all municipal meetings. I am happy to report that all of these great community features were maintained for 2018 without a tax increase.

Financially, Monroeville has become more stable with an increase in its fund balance and a reduction in its debt service. The fund balance has increased due to several factors: not hiring when people leave positions with current staff taking on more responsibility, an increase in the auditing efforts of the tax office, along with management and department heads keeping their budgets in line. Municipal Manager Little, along with the mayor and council, made the decision for the past several years to not borrow money for capital improvements such as road paving and large necessary purchases for the municipality as was the previous approach. That approach had left us with a high debt service that we want to avoid adding to while being committed to paying it down. We have made great progress doing so. This has recently led to an improved bond rating to Aa3 by Moody's which also assigned a positive outlook for Monroeville in 2017.

Our tax office staff and Mr. Fulkerson, our elected tax collector, continue to collect taxes at a high level and due to an increase in auditing have collected approximately \$1 million above their projections each of the past two years. In 2017, our real estate transfer tax increased about 45% from the previous year which is an indication of an increase in properties being purchased and their values. We have also seen an increase in business licenses over the past year, which demonstrates that Monroeville's commerce is growing.

Our library and senior citizen center continue to grow while providing a wide range of programming for Monroeville and its citizens. Both have seen strong growth in programming and attendance. Our senior center also continues to expand its fitness classes and equipment for individuals 50 years and older. Our recreation and parks department also provides special programs, a concert series, and numerous parks to offer outdoor activity for all ages. Also, this past year, the Westmoreland Heritage Trail section through Monroeville has been completed and offers a safe area to bike, walk and run.

There has been a lot of development in 2017. The total number of permits issued has been consistent, but the estimated improvement cost increased from \$19.7 million in 2016 to \$47 million in 2017 which is a direct reflection of the amount of land development projects that were approved by council this past year. The larger approvals of 2017 were: 2 additions for Forbes

Hospital, Northern Pike retail center, BPMI expansion, Center Road Plaza expansion, A & I. Motors expansion, The Healing Center, Get-Go Fueling Station, Walnut Ivanhoe Partners leasing office / community room and the Tykes gas station corner redevelopment project.

Code enforcement violation letters have seen a dramatic increase from 318 in 2016 to 2696 in 2017. This is a direct result of council approving the hiring of more code enforcers which has permitted the department to be more aggressive with identifying violations. This is an important stance to take in an effort to stay ahead of property violations which are detrimental to neighborhoods, the community and property values. Council and I believe that this is of the utmost importance and will continue to support this stance.

Public works continues to maintain our public buildings, outdoor spaces and roadways. Providing maintenance, landscaping, and snow removal. Garbage and recycling collection also continues to be a valuable service provided by your tax dollars. In 2017, curbside cardboard and paper recycling have been added and every household was offered a free additional recycling can. This program now accepts a wide range of products which is not only good for the environment but will also prolong the "life" of our landfill.

We continue to provide excellent public safety with our in-house dispatch center, police, fire, and EMS providers. This year, we will be in the process of upgrading our public safety radio system which will be state-of-the-art. Also, council completed the lengthy process of certifying a list of potential hires for our police department. This list will allow us to add to our department as needed over the next 2 years. We have recently hired 4 officers and will be swearing them in this evening. We also plan to hire more officers this spring.

Monroeville's crime rate has been down over the past two years. The entire police department has done an outstanding job keeping us safe. In addition, our community wide camera system has been a valuable tool to swiftly solve incidents and deter crime. The department has also gotten more involved with retail theft which has been a conscious effort to be more aggressive with these types of cases to send a message that Monroeville will not tolerate such behavior. We want it to be known that if you come to Monroeville to commit a crime, you will be caught.

Monroeville had experienced strong growth in the post-war 1950's and was a leader in suburban living. With research jobs and being a major retail hub with business 22, the Miracle Mile and the Monroeville Mall. Although the face of retail has changed with online commerce, Monroeville still greatly benefits from our business district but has to find ways to evolve with this new way of shopping while continuing to offer restaurant and entertainment options. Also, with the former departure of some major employers, we have seen a shift in employment to the healthcare industry with the strong presence of both Allegheny Health Network, Forbes Hospital, UPMC and Procure Pharmacy, our top three employers. Not only are they providing jobs, but offering all levels of patient care right here in our community.

Monroeville's age has left us with older infrastructure that has to be maintained. We also have capital improvements within our municipal buildings and departments that need to be tended to and not ignored as well. Some of these repairs will be federally mandated by the EPA with storm water management requirements. The Municipality has enacted a storm water management program which provides for the operation of a storm sewer system and rules that need to be followed. This program is regulated by the Federal Clean Water Act under a system called the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Separate Storm Sewer

System permit, which is commonly referred to as an MS4 permit. Under this program, the municipality is required to obtain an MS4 permit to discharge storm water. The permit stipulates many activities that the municipality must conduct in order to stay in compliance. There are ongoing costs for this program that will need to be addressed. We eventually will require a steady stream of income to pay for these repairs, capital improvements, and the upkeep of our community.

What can we do better? I recommend to council to consider providing computer software to the tax department that can further analyze local data to ensure properties, businesses and individuals are properly registered and missing taxpayers and payments are identified. Before honest taxpayers are asked to pay more, we need to make sure everyone else is properly paying.

We need to dedicate resources and be persistent with finding good businesses and locating them here. We have many available options where new development can build or existing commercial property can be renovated. Developers, companies, and real estate brokers need to know about these opportunities.

I will encourage council to pass and implement our Joint Comprehensive Plan that has been worked on with Wilkins Township and Churchill over the past year. It addresses some ways we can further advance our community. Part of this document overlaps with what I believe we need to address, which is identifying ways to improve bicycle and pedestrian activity and safety in Monroeville as much as possible. The car dependent design of Monroeville works for many but it is not exactly what young professionals and 21st century businesses such as Amazon are looking for. They desire an urban community feel that embraces walking, biking and healthy lifestyles mixed with the use of automobiles. In 2017, council obtained a grant from Allegheny county to explore such changes. In this same vein, I also believe we should expand our trail network where we logically can, and support the long-term goal along with neighboring communities to connect the Westmoreland Heritage Trail to the Great Allegheny Passage, which runs from Pittsburgh to Maryland and continues on to Washington, D.C. Our shared vision should be to maintain our vibrant community in order to retain our current residents and businesses, and to make improvements to attract new ones.

Monroeville has a lot to offer: Wonderful services and amenities, good schools, strong public safety, a great civic foundation, and a wide range of businesses and organizations. Many people from “the outside” think Monroeville is just Business 22 from the Miracle Mile to the Mall. We all know it is much more. If you want a neighborhood where you can walk your child to school, we have that. If you want a park or playground near your house, we have that. If you want an excellent library, or the offerings of a thriving senior center, we have both. Whether you are looking for an apartment, a starter home, a million-dollar one or anything in between, we have that. If you want the convenience of local shopping and restaurants, we have that. And if you need world-class healthcare, regardless of your health insurance, we also have that. All of this plus Monroeville still is at the crossroads of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Interstate 76, U.S. Route 22, Interstate 376 and long-term will include the Mon-Fayette Expressway. As Mayor, I believe all of this is what we need to be proclaiming to everyone. Monroeville is a great place to live and to do business. As your Mayor, this is my priority, to broadcast this where I can, to encourage growth. Please join me in doing so in 2018.